

Submitter: Jennifer Wells
On Behalf Of:
Committee: Senate Committee On Education
Measure: SB1583

Dear Senate Committee on Education:

I am writing in support of SB 1583. I have been a resident of Oregon for over a year—prior to that, I worked in adult education and public libraries in Oklahoma for over ten years. I am sorry to say that one of the reasons for my move was the increasing anti-education and anti-library activism in my home state.

I am fully in favor of the right of citizens to control what materials they and their children have access to, as well as their right to ask their local institutions to reconsider materials. These are part of the fundamental ethics of library service. Lately, however, we have seen a coordinated attack on library materials that is escalating to attacks on libraries and library workers.

Nationwide, polls show that the majority of Americans trust librarians to do their jobs and select appropriate materials for their communities (https://www.everylibraryinstitute.org/final_perceptions_report_new_demog_paper). However, a small but vocal minority are pressuring libraries to remove books they consider inappropriate. They use polarizing, attacking language, calling books with LGBTQ+ themes “pornography” and referring to library workers as “groomers.” Books that address injustice in American society, either historically or currently, are lambasted as “the woke agenda” and accused of making white children feel bad about themselves. If these materials are not removed, these groups often escalate, using tactics such as seeking to defund the library, trying to get library workers fired, and even threatening violence. Online presences such as Libs of Tiktok are well-known for stoking ire against libraries and schools, including Oregon’s Driftwood Public Library in Lincoln City. The social media page is considered responsible for inspiring several bomb threats to schools, libraries, and hospitals.

Sadly, many legislators and politicians are taking advantage of this furor to advance their own agendas. There are the recent examples of a Missouri candidate for Secretary of State taking a flamethrower to books she felt didn’t belong in a public library, and Oklahoma’s Secretary of Education, Ryan Walters, appointing Chaya Raichik, the person behind Libs of Tiktok, to the state library board, despite Raichik having no experience in education or connection to Oklahoma. We can look to these states and see what may happen in Oregon’s future if we do not stand up now against censorship. I am heartened, however, to see the Oregon Legislature considering SB 1583, and I wish to express my support for the bill. The examples cited above (the most recent of many, unfortunately) demonstrate why I believe this

bill is important and necessary.

Libraries, whether school or public, are at their core meant to provide opportunities for all community members to both see themselves reflected and experience different viewpoints. A person may choose what they want to read, but they do not have the right to dictate what other people may read. There are many books in my local library that I disagree with, and even some that I consider dangerous, but I understand that other members of my community feel differently, and I respect that. I believe that the majority of Oregonians, and Americans, feel the same.

Sincerely,

Jennifer Wells